DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 233 419 CS 504 347

AUTHOR Bezzini, John J.; Desmond, Roger Jon
TITLE Adoption Processes of Cable Television.
PUB DATE Nov 82
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (Dallas, TX, May 26-30, 1983).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adoption (Ideas); Adults; Attitudes; Audiences; *Cable Television; Communication Research; *Interpersonal Communication; *Television Research; *Television Surveys; Television Viewing
IDENTIFIERS Audience Analysis; *Family Communication; Media Adoption; Media Use

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine the place of cable in the lives of subscribers and its perception among nonsubscribers. Subjects, 251 subscribers and 246 nonsubscribers in a northeastern city midway in the process of cable diffusion, responded to a number of questions concerning their recreational activities, sources of information about cable, reasons for adoption or nonadoption of the medium, family communication about it, and ownership of other media technologies, such as video games. Demographic data were also gathered. Results showed that those subscribing to cable television services were more affluent, more likely to be married, and more likely to live in households with children than were nonsubscribers. The data also suggested that cable television was most often requested by children in a household, and that parents often yielded to their requests for the type of programing provided by cable. When children left a home, parents declined to subscribe, offering reasons suggesting that cable is a commodity that needs justification rather than a necessity that stands alone. Overall, the findings indicate that the decision to subscribe, maintain, and terminate subscription to cable television takes place within a matrix of interpersonal communication. (FL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED233419

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

Adoption Processes of Cable Television

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
John J. Bezzini

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

by

John J. Bezzini

and

Roger Jon Desmond

Department of Communication

University of Hartford

November, 1982

CS 504 347

The rapid acceptance of cable television by consumers is a remarkable phenomenon in mass communication history, equalled only by the growth of radio and broadcast television in their early periods. This acceleration is even more dramatic in light of the fact that cable television is still unavailable in many parts of the country. Currently, 29% of United States households have cable, and the most recent projection for 1990 is 60% of households (Waters and Hackett, 1980).

Research concerning the adoption of this medium has not developed as rapidly as has cable. The bulk of research concerning cable are either demographically oriented investigations of cable's share of the television market, or viewing time and program preferences of samples of viewers (Kaplan, 1978). The factors that surround the decision to adopt cable television and the meaning of it in the lives of its adopters have not been investigated in any systematic studies. The purpose of the present investigation is to shed light on the place of cable in the available choices of leisure time, the perception of the importance of the medium, and the extent to which cable television alters other activities.

Cable Research

One likely reason for the narrowness of scope of research is that it has primarily been executed by organizations which primarily serve broadcast television, for the ultimate purpose of corporate decision making. The findings of this type of research are generally market-specific, and do not allow for

generalization across the cable audience.

A recent study, for example, found an extremely high level of satisfaction with the medium, and that its primary appeal was diversity of offerings, including movies and sports (Opinion Research Corp., 1980). An important outcome of cable adoption appears to be more total viewing, more channel loyalty, and a dramatic decrease in movie attendance, as compared to non-adopters (Nielsen, 1979). While viewers equipped with cable watch and listen to less broadcast channel news, the effect on print is negligible (Kaplan, 1978). The majority of studies indicate that the presence of pay channels such as HBO or Showtime exacerbates these conclusions (Ross, 1980).

The trend of existing cable research has focussed on demographics and the economic viability of introducing cable into an urban area. Few studies have examined the medium in the light of communication theory, to determine its place in the hierarchy of leisure time activities.

Little is known, for example, concerning the extent to which cable and pay cable systems resemble network television in terms of viewer use, and viewers perceptions of its benefits. In the history of mass communication, the usual result of the introduction of a new medium is displacement, or the temporary decline of interest in an existing medium following the introduction of a new one (Wright, 1975). After a short period of time, the older medium recovers by accommodating to the new one. An example of this trend is the resurgence in popularity of A.M. radio after it had suffered

audience losses to the new medium, early network television. Even though television could provide news, sports, and dramatic entertainment, radio could best provide popular recorded music.

The focus of this study was on the place of cable television in the lives of adopters of the medium, as well as the perception of cable among non-adopters. The following research questions were addressed in this investigation:

1) What are the major differences between adopters and non-adopters of the medium in terms of demographics, entertainment preferences, and television viewing patterns?

2) Among cable subscribers, how did adopters come to know about the medium? What is the relative role of interpersonal and mass communication in informing people about cable services?

3) Among non-adopters of the medium, what are people's reasons for failing to adopt cable television?

4) Who, within a household, generally makes the decision to subscribe to cable television?

5) What are the differences in leisure time activities between adopters of cable and non-adopters?

Method

A sample of 497 respondents were interviewed by telephone in July and August of 1981. Respondents were drawn from a suburban city in the northeast, from a total population of 52,000. The city selected for this study was chosen because cable service had been available for slightly over one year, and was one of the most recently established cable franchises in the area. The attempt was to locate a community which was

midway in the process of cable diffusion, in order to locate respondents who were in various stages of adopting or considering the adoption of cable services.

Cable subscribers were randomly drawn from lists of subscribers furnished by the cable franchise, while non-subscribers were randomly drawn from the telephone directory, with random-number generation to insure unlisted respondents. An initial screening question was used to identify non-subscribers. The final sample contained 251 cable subscribers and 246 non-subscribers.

Respondents were interviewed by a trained staff, using a 49 item instrument for subscribers and a 37 item instrument for non-subscribers. Interviews required 12-15 minutes to complete, and cooperation rate was 22% for all interviews.

The instrument contained a variety of questions designed to elicit recreation activities (including television viewing patterns), sources of information about cable, reasons for adoption or non-adoption, family communication about cable, and ownership of other media technologies such as projection T.V. or video games. The instrument was extensively pre-tested, using focus group techniques on a small sample of respondents.

Results and Discussion

Since the majority of questions were qualitative, nominally or ordinarily scaled inventories, the analysis was primarily executed using comparisons of responses between both groups rather than inferential statistical tests. Given the exploratory nature of this study, the research questions are

best addressed with comparisons of response patterns between the two groups.

Research question one addressed the difference between the two groups in terms of demographic characteristics and use of leisure time. The most dramatic demographic differences between the two groups are in the variables of income, and family size of respondents.

In terms of income, reluctance to report family income by respondents necessitated the use of income categories of $5,000. Those categories which contained respondents earning between $15,000 and $34,000 most differentiate the two groups. This income bracket contains 46% of the cable subscribers and 31% of non-subscribers. In those income groups below $15,000 fell 23% of the non-subscribers and 12% of the subscribers.

With respect to family size, 80% of the respondents in the subscriber group were married as compared to 58% of the non-adopters. Of the cable subscribers, 36% reported having at least one school-aged child in the home as opposed to 20% of the non-subscribers with a school aged child.

In terms of leisure time activities, respondents were asked what their first choice of leisure time behaviors would be, if they had only two hours per day to spend. At-home choices included radio, television, reading, and stereo. Television was the most popular medium in both groups, but non-adopters chose newspapers, magazines and books more than did adopters (61% and 40%, respectively). Out-of-home recreation was more pronounced in the non-subscriber category:

25% of non-subscribers attend at least one movie per month, while only 10% of the subscribers do. Additionally, 57% of non-adopters take automobile pleasure trips while 47% of adopters do so once per month or more.

Research question two was designed to determine how people initially come to know about cable services. Various items in the instrument were used to elicit these data. One set of questions probed subscribers initial sources of information about cable television, how to subscribe, and costs of subscription. In the adopter categories, 71% of the subscribers first heard about cable from friends or relatives. Of the non-adopters, 54% heard about cable through interpersonal sources.

Mass media were more important sources of cable information for non-subscribers than for those who elected cable services. Television, radio, magazine or newspaper advertising were the first sources of information about cable for a total of 13% of subscribers and 24% of non-subscribers.

A series of other communication-frequency items indicate that subscribers talk about television more than non-subscribers, and cable subscribers, when asked to estimate how many of their friends and neighbors subscribe, give much higher estimates of general adoption than do non-subscribers.

Research question three concerns reasons for adoption and non-adoption. Non-adopters were asked why they had not subscribed; their three major reasons were: "expense" (40%), "don't watch T.V. enough to justify subscribing" (17%) and "not

home enough" (6%). Other reasons given were assorted, including such explanations as the children had left the home or the possibility of children being exposed to objectionable content. Each of these anecdotal reasons were offered by less than 1% of the non-subscriber sample.

When the subscriber sample was asked about the attraction of cable, the three major factors expressed were "choice of more stations" (40%), "uninterrupted movies" (21%) and "sports" (15%). Other reasons included old movies, reruns, children's programs, and religious programming.

Research question four investigated who makes the decision to adopt cable, when the household consists of more than one person. Since the majority of subscribers (81%) lived with spouses and other family members, this amounted to an assessment of who in the family decided to adopt cable. Of the subscribers, 35% reported that they made the decision themselves, 22% reported that their spouses made the decision (the majority of these were wives) and 37% reported a collective, family decision.

In terms of the initial request for cable, 59% reported that they or their spouses requested cable, and 13% reported that their children initially requested cable television. The remainder of the sample were unable to recall who initially made the request.

The final research question explored the differences between cable adopters and non-subscribers in terms of general leisure patterns. The results are featured in Table One.

[Table One about here]

Inspection of the differences reveals that adopters of cable read less than non-adopters, attend less movies, and travel for pleasure less often than do non-adopters. There was no pronounced difference in theatre attendance, but neither group exhibits a great deal of interest in the theatre.

An additional set of questions was asked of cable adopters concerning how important the medium is in their recreational spectrum. A hypothetical situation was presented to respondents in which the family income was seriously reduced. Respondents were asked which recreational items would be dropped first in the light of drastically lowered incomes. Dining out would be eliminated by 36% of the adopters, while 30% would eliminate movie attendance. Cable television would be eliminated by 20% of the adopters, and 8% would give up new clothes.

Respondents in the adopter category were also asked if they would still subscribe in the event of a basic cable price increase. If the increase was $5, 49% of the sample would drop the service; if the increase was $10, cable would be elminated by 86% of the adopters.

Discussion

Those who subscribe to cable television are more affluent, more likely to be married, and live in households with more children than non-subscribers. While these demographic differences are hardly dramatic or surprising, when they are

coupled with some of the other findings of this investigation, a coherent profile of the cable subscriber begins to emerge. Specifically, these data collectively suggest that cable television is requested by children in a household, and parents often yield to children's requests for the type of programming that cable brings. When children leave the home, parents decline to subscribe, offering reasons which suggest that cable is a commodity which needs justification, rather than a necessity which stands alone.

While this research was not designed to explore causal relationships among the variables, there are suggestive findings which bear investigation in further research. Given that subscribers read less, travel for pleasure less, and attend fewer movies than do non-subscribers, does the adoption of cable initiate a sedentary, stay at home lifestyle, or would the less active subscribers simply find other home entertainment sources if cable were not available?

The communication frequency items reveal an increased tendency to talk about cable television as well as broadcast television by subscribers. Non-subscribers come to know about cable and the services it offers through print media. One of the implications of this channel distinction is that a large percentage of non-adopters were confused about the price of basic cable service: many believed that basic cable costs as much as $35. This misconception apparently came about when non-subscribers elicited the one dimension of cable television from interpersonal channels which is not available through media:

price of cable services. In the market selected for study, as in other markets, cable companies do not advertise prices. The primary reason given by companies is that confusion would result, given the multiplicity of optional extra channels available in most markets.

Anecdotal evidence from several respondents who were probed suggested the following pattern: A person inquires of neighbor who has cable "How much does it cost?" The neighbor replies: "35 dollars per month." The respondent does not mention that he pays for multiple sets and extra entertainment and sports channels. Thus, the confusion over basic cable price multiples through interpersonal communication. If this misperception is to blame for the confusion over price, this finding contradicts the findings of many other diffusion studies: in this case, interpersonal communication may have inhibited the adoption of cable television among some of these respondents.

Results of this investigation do support a general innovativeness factor which has been found in other studies of adoption (Coleman, et al., 1957). Subscribers to cable were more likely to own a videotape recorder than non-subscribers (11% vs. 3%) or video games (20% vs. 8%). This tendency toward general innovativeness is repeated throughout the history of the diffusion literature.

The fact that, faced with substantially reduced incomes, many people would give up dining out and attending movies before they would give up cable,suggests that the medium, once

adopted, becomes a part of the lifestyle rather than an expendable luxury. Given the importance of these activities in the family leisure spectrum, the popularity of cable television is a dramatic finding.

Finally, the results of this investigation demonstrate that the decision to adopt, maintain, and to terminate a subscription to cable television takes place within a matrix of interpersonal communication. Talking about the medium with others affects more than initial decision making; it mediates user's perceptions of the worth of cable, both in economic and qualitative terms. Conversations within family and peer networks both inform and misinform potential adopters about these dimensions. Given the importance of these networks, continuing research should address the extent to which interpersonal communication will play a role in the future of cable television. Since the beginning of availability, much speculation has been advanced regarding the threat to broadcast television; will this topic become an important theme in conversations about cable? If people exhibit comparisons and contrasts between cable and broadcast programs as a theme in their conversations, this dimension could conceivable emerge as a major factor in future adoption decisions. If it does not, then the discovery of other relevant themes is an important research task.

References

Coleman, James, Elihu Katz, and James Mendel. "The Diffusion of an Innovation Among Physicians." Sociometry, 20 (1957), pp. 253-270.

Kaplan, Stuart. "The Impact of Cable on the Use of Competing Media." Journal of Broadcasting, 22, 2 (Spring 1978), p. 158.

Nielsen Corporation, "1979 Syndicated Pay Cable Research Report." A.C. Nielsen Corporation, New York, December, 1979.

Opinion Research Corporation, cited in Stanley Marcus, "The Viewers Verdict So Far On Cable T.V.," Panorama, 1, 9, (October, 1980), p. 42.

Ross, Ruth. "A Comprehensive Study of Cable Television: Nationally and in Southern New England." Unpublished Report, W.F.S.B., Hartford, Conn., September, 1980.

Waters, Harry F. and George Hackett. "Cable's Culture Splurge." Newsweek, Dec. 22, 1980, p. 58.

Wright, Charles R. Mass Communication: A Sociological Perspective. New York: Random House, 1975, p. 100.

TABLE ONE

Differences in Leisure Activities Between Subscribers and Non-Subscribers

	Subscribers (N=251)	Non-Subscribers (N=246)
Favorite way of spending leisure time - media?		
Television	58%	37%
Radio	17%	20%
Newspapers	16%	28%
Books	7%	12%
How often do you go to movies?		
Never	37%	30%
Less than once per month	46%	37%
Once per month	9.6%	24%
More than once per month	6.4%	8.5%
How often do you go to the theatre?		
Never	47%	48%
Less than once per month	43%	41%
Once per month	5.6%	9.3%
More than once per month	2.4%	.8%
How often do you travel for pleasure?		
Never	8%	10%
Less than once per month	43%	32%
Once per month	19%	24.8%
More than once per month	28.3%	32%